

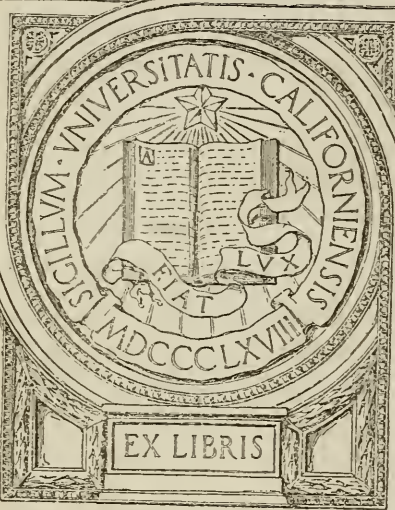
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THE LIFE-WORSHIP  
OF  
RICHARD JEFFERIES.



By ARTHUR F. THORN.

THE PIONEER PRESS, 61 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

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THE LIFE-WORSHIP OF RICHARD JEFFERIES.

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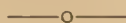
BY  
ARTHUR F. THORN.

LONDON:  
THE PIONEER PRESS,  
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*Under the title of "Richard Jefferies and Civilisation," a portion of this essay was published a few years back. The reception given to that essay has warranted a larger venture on the same topic.*



## PREFACE.



In the following pages I have endeavoured to emphasise those Cosmic values which Richard Jefferies expressed in his later writings, particularly in "The Story of My Heart." In this unique "confession" Jefferies' supreme value becomes manifest ; it contains the fervent outpourings of his exquisitely life-conscious spirit, and possesses a significance of immense importance to civilisation.

Civilisation to-day is tending to destroy even the possibility of our attaining the cosmic consciousness. We are losing the joy of life, gaining the material world, and, in the cosmic sense, losing our souls.

Richard Jefferies may be interpreted from many conflicting standpoints. Some have labelled him "mystic," others "agnostic," while many have sought to invest his work with a materialistic or purely scientific value, but the cosmic Jefferies has been mislaid.

Our hope of regaining a more primitive, pure, and joyous life, lies in whatever degree we may attain the intense consciousness of being which Jefferies possessed.

I have attempted to throw into sharp relief against the ideas of Jefferies those materialistic standards of life which our commercial civilisation has interposed between man and his recognition of the universal or cosmic values.

A. F. T.

expressed in terms of civilisation. The leisure and opportunity for coming consciously to terms with life are by civilisation denied. It is not surprising under these conditions that a cosmic writer like Jefferies should be neglected and misunderstood.

A mode of life like our civilisation, based fundamentally upon artificial values, must in time produce a condition of mind which is itself highly artificial, and, at the same time, unconscious of its artificiality.

The most important work, therefore, to be accomplished to-day is a re-valuation of the prevailing standards of life. We have to show that a higher and altogether healthier standard of live values is possible for man. Our task commences with the necessity of convincing men that these other and higher values do exist and have been expressed. We have to place civilisation, with its artificial values of life, against an ideal like Jefferies', with its higher and cosmic values, so that the true and the false may stand forth clear and distinct.

The first difficulty that we encounter in attempting such a re-valuation is, as we have already seen, the antipathy of the civilised mind; and were this antipathy final or absolute, then, indeed, would our task be futile, but, if we investigate the inaccessibility of the civilised mind from a psychological standpoint, we discover that its antipathy does not proceed from conscious motive, but rather springs from a mental inertia which has been produced artificially.

In communicating with this mind, we may use words in their purest and non-civilised sense; but

the pure idea which we desire to convey is not grasped by our audience; they receive the word in its civilised and false sense only. The words LIFE and JOY, for example, may contain meanings and values to-day which they were not intended to contain. The word LIFE is used nowadays to describe the shallow existence led by "society"; but this existence is properly labelled Death, not Life. Again, the word Joy is confused with mere artificially stimulated sensation. This is seen clearly in that modern invention, the "Joy Wheel," upon which men and women are whirled round and round, and finally flung off, shrieking in confusion.

The work of re-valuation commences, therefore, with a clearing away of the accumulated false meanings which have grown about and choked a few simple words. The term "mystic" or "dreamer" with which the average mind will label Jefferies, is, in this particular application, a very complex corruption. Mysticism is an Eastern philosophy of "other world"; it is a philosophy born of contemplation and repose (qualities which are not produced by our Western civilisation). To the Eastern mind, the mystic conception of human existence is a reality, but the Western mind thinks of and uses the term in order to express something vague, hazy, and dreamy. It is, in fact, impossible for the Western mind to comprehend Mysticism in its pure and Eastern sense. But, apart from this necessary digression, Richard Jefferies is not, in the pure Eastern sense, a "Mystic" at all. The distinction between the ideas which Jefferies expressed in "The Story of My

Heart " and " Mysticism " both in its pure Eastern sense and in its corrupt Western sense, is very sharply defined. The two ideas, " Mysticism " and Jefferies' Cosmic Consciousness are separate and detached ; but when applied to the Western mind they become confused and corrupt. What possible significance can the philosophy of " other world " have for the busy commercial man, and, on the other hand, what can Jefferies' Cosmic Consciousness convey ? Neither of these conceptions of life are a part of civilisation, and cannot be translated into the language of civilisation.

Yet, if the modern mind cannot comprehend the Cosmic Consciousness which Jefferies possessed, it will be able to grasp the idea of Mysticism, or Other-World in the corrupt sense. The word Mysticism or Other-World will be understood merely as a negation, or as a denial of the workaday world. " Mysticism " and " Other World " will mean something quite Utopian, impossible, impracticable, and opposed both to progress and to material security. The average individual will agree that such dreaming is all very well, etc. In a fashion, he will probably believe that there is something " religious " about the idea of Other-World or Mysticism. He may recall the popular stories of the Hindoo Yogis, who sit in the same uncomfortable positions for many hours, even days, at a time, contemplating Space, and concentrating their consciousness upon other things, not of this world ; but the spirit which prompts the Hindoos to perform such extraordinary feats will lie beyond the reach of his intelligence.

He will further confuse the idea of Mysticism with Superstition ; he will then return to his mechanical and commercial routine and forget all about Other-World. Here and there a man possessed of a little more than average imagination may make a secret cult of Mysticism in his spare time, and, in consequence, become lax in commercial affairs; but Jefferies' ideas do not come within the consciousness of such men at all, not even in this slight degree.

The fact is that Mysticism or Other-World, in relation to the modern civilised mind, means the antithesis of this world; it means the sweeping away of this world, the destruction of earth, of matter, of flesh, of life, of Nature; it means, in short, the death of the five senses. The true Mystic, of course, gains a Spiritual joy which compensates him for whatever "material" pleasures he has forfeited, but the Western mind cannot balance the purely negative aspect of Mysticism with any compensating result, and is, therefore, unable to accept it as a philosophy of life.

It is not difficult to understand why the merely negative aspect of Mysticism finds many Western adherents, whereas Jefferies finds very few, for in an existence in which man's nature is stunted and in which all those supreme qualities of body and of mind, upon which Jefferies insisted, are discounted, how can it be otherwise? Man, no longer conscious of his natural heritage of beauty of form and of mind, is quite willing to embrace a philosophy which denies their possibility, and even desirability. Mysticism, therefore, as the Western mind conceives

it, means the mere negative repudiation of all that man is here and now conscious of; and it follows clearly that the less Joy of Life that man is here and now conscious of, the more attractive will be the idea of "Other-World." . . . I have found it necessary thus to dispose of Mysticism in its relation to the average Western mind, in order to clear the way for Jefferies' "Soul-thought" or Cosmic Consciousness, which has very little in common with the philosophy of "Other-World."

\* \* \* \*

Civilised man has become deeply conscious, not of his ego in any idealistic or spiritual sense, but of those purely material considerations which have become, through continual habit and routine, part and parcel of his environment. The success of a commercial civilisation demands this sacrifice. It is inevitable that a society in which man in order to exist is compelled to eliminate from his consciousness all other than purely commercial values must eventually create certain arbitrary standards of life which exclude all other and opposing standards.

We have seen that the attitude of the Western mind to "Mysticism" is one of complete indifference, but at the same time it will label a writer "Mystic" if by chance he should express ideas that come into conflict with the materially commercial world. We have also seen that Mysticism may be understood merely as a negation, as a denial or repudiation of this world; there is, in fact, no popular belief in Mysticism as a positive philosophy. The Western mind becomes so grotesquely muddled



whenever it attempts to deal with abstract ideas that it is no wonder that Richard Jefferies has been labelled "Mystic."

What special or unique quality, then, did Jefferies possess? Jefferies possessed an intense consciousness of personal existence, not in relation to "Other-World," not in relation to scientific or aesthetic materialism, but in relation to the spirit of life itself. He had a consciousness of life in its essence; his whole being thrilled and responded to the elemental forces of existence, of which he felt himself to be a conscious manifestation.

Life, in its manifestations, is infinite. No extreme is impossible, either upon the upward or the downward line. Civilised man is possessed of little or no consciousness of Life in the Cosmic sense. Not only is civilised man lacking in cosmic consciousness, but he is unconscious that he lacks. Jefferies, on the other hand, possesses the cosmic consciousness, and is intensely aware of the fact.

Jefferies, by reason of his intense consciousness of life perceives the vacuum which exists in the average civilised mind. "The complacency," he says, "with which the mass of people go about their daily task, absolutely indifferent to all other considerations, is appalling in its concentrated stolidity. . . . So wedded and so confirmed is the world in its narrow groove of self. . . . I almost despair to see it awakened. . . . If the whole of the dead in a hillside cemetery were called up alive from their tombs, and walked forth down into the valley, it would not rouse the mass of people from the dense

pyramid of stolidity which presses on them. There would be gaping and marvelling and rushing about, and what then? In a week or two the ploughman would settle down to his plough, the carpenter to his bench, the smith to his anvil, the merchant to his money, and the dead come to life would be utterly forgotten."

Many readers may consider this to be an extreme statement. But, consider for a moment the ephemeral effect that great and appalling human catastrophies have upon the modern mind. In ancient times the fatality which determined the tragic destruction of human life was made the theme of noble and inspiring epics; whereas, to-day, the wholesale destruction of human life causes but a fleeting public emotion. The earthquake, for example, which annihilates men, women, and children in hundreds of thousands. How soon is this horror forgotten! The wreck of an ocean-going liner, involving the loss of several thousands of our own fellow-countrymen's lives. Two weeks of newspaper froth, and the whole thing is evaporated!

The unimaginative quality of the civilised mind prevents such tragedies from being fully realised; they skim over the surface of consciousness, causing only very slight impressions. "No matter," says Jefferies, "in what manner the possibilities of human life are put before the world, the crowd continues as stolid as before."

The mind sufficiently virile to detach itself from the level stream of mediocrity is rare. The natural docility of the average civilised mind creates a



mental atmosphere in Society which is hostile to all ideas outside the most elementary and obvious manifestations of life, and absorbs every cunning tyranny and sly despotism with an almost incredible eagerness. No lie is too great or too fantastic for the civilised mind, providing that the lie is based upon the continued acceptance of commonplace ideas and conventional thought.

The evolving of characters in such a diseased environment where servile emotions predominate is almost an impossibility. By character it is not intended to convey the orthodox conception. The mechanical devotion to a mechanical and joyless labour, the feverish slavery of body and mind to the immoralities of modern business and trade do not involve the necessity of character at all: they demand the lifeless infallibility of the electric clock "character" which submits without even a minimum of mental protest to the insistent demands of modern conventional ideas, either in religion, art, or in commerce, cannot correctly be termed "character"—it is inertia, indifference to the cosmic reality of life, contentment, mental vacuity, the cessation of growth, and spiritual death.

The modern civilised world is peopled with that type of devitalized individual who is "unconscious of the sun," whose mental and intellectual qualities have never even commenced to function. You can do very little or nothing for them, or with them. Everything seems to fail. Religion, art, science, philosophy, free-thought, mysticism, and materialism. It seems that the whole gamut of human

thought is entirely unable to aid or develop the normal civilised brain.

Fundamentally, it is the tragedy of the child. Jefferies realised this to the full. "All of you," he says, "with little children . . . take them into the country among green grass and yellow wheat, among trees, by hills and streams, if you wish their highest education—that of the heart and the soul—to be accomplished. Therein they shall find a secret—a knowledge not to be written—not to be found in books. They shall know the sun and the wind, the running water, and the breast of the broad earth. Under the green spring, among the hazel boughs where the nightingale sings, they shall find a secret, a feeling, a sense that fills the heart with an emotion never to be forgotten. They will forget the books; they will never forget the grassy fields. If you wish your children to think deep things, to know the holiest emotions, take them to the woods and hills, and give them the freedom of the meadows."

The tragedy of the child mind in modern civilisation has been, or should have been, made obvious to every thinker by the conditions of life which we find around us to-day. The child mind, so delicate and pure in quality, so susceptible to environment, and so fanciful in its imagination, has for its home to-day an insane hotbed of corrupted brains and decadent ideas. All things would seem to conspire against the purity and delicacy of the child mind. It is born flower-like into an atmosphere reeking with the foul odours of extreme commercialism,

sordid competition, struggles for-existence and general degradation.

Who can adequately estimate the disastrous psychological effects of our diseased civilisation upon the infant personality? Look, for instance, in a modern toy-shop, and you will find nothing beautiful. Only those children gifted with abnormal character and personality can withstand, or attempt to withstand, the polluted stream of civilisation as it sweeps down into the gutters of time.

"The most extraordinary spectacle," says Jeffries, "is the vast expenditure of labour and time wasted in obtaining mere subsistence. As a man, in his lifetime, works hard and saves money, that his children may be free from the cares of penury and may at least have sufficient to eat, drink, clothe, and roof them, so the generations that preceded us might, had they so chosen, have provided for our subsistence. The labour and time of ten generations, properly directed, would sustain a hundred generations succeeding to them, and that, too, with so little self-denial on the part of the providers as to be scarcely felt. So men now, in this generation, ought clearly to be laying up a store, or what is still more powerful, arranging and organising that the generations which follow may enjoy comparative freedom from useless labour. Instead of which, with transcendent improvidence, the world works only for to-day, the world worked twelve thousand years ago, and our children's children will still have to toil and slave for the bare necessities of life. This is, indeed, an extraordinary spectacle."

The question of the sanity of man is one with which few minds are troubled. But how is it possible for those clear brains, so much alive to the fact of life, as to be perpetually at war with the extraordinary social conventions of the human race, to avoid for any length of time the problem of the sanity of man? Almost every manifestation of civilisation is so deliberately stupid, sordid and ugly as to create a feeling of intense revulsion. The tone of popular thought, if it can legitimately be termed thought, is on a plane of obvious decadence and insanity. The seeker after truth, beauty, dignity of purpose, and the enlightenment of the human race generally, discovers practically no vital response to his exertions. He is pushed outside the feverish stream of current "life," and more and more is driven inwards to live his dream unseen, unheard, neglected and labelled "crank."

Where, then, the pertinent question arises, is to be found sanity, or at least, a desire for its establishment on earth? A people possessed of one-tenth the sanity of a man like Jefferies would not tolerate the existing conditions of life for twenty-four hours. A sudden lightning stroke of sanity would cause the people to realise that the precious gift of life was being thwarted in a thousand sinister ways; that an existence which might be made a radiant journey of delight and decency was being converted into a monstrous nightmare, far worse, in many respects, than death itself.

\* \* \* \*

The purity and power of the sun's rays inspired

in Jefferies a consciousness that human life had, in some inexplicable fashion, taken a mental direction which made health of mind and body almost impossible. Humanity has not developed a sense of cosmic rationalism: it cannot seize upon the fact of life—of existence with dynamic creative energy: the result is that mental stagnation has supervened and human society, plagued with many evil forces like religion, commercialism, and superstition, cannot make any effective headway in the direction of a full life.

Jefferies saw civilised man as an unconscious beast of burden, loaded almost to extinction with such useless encumbrances as prevent him from becoming free, and conscious of freedom. Jefferies knew that each individual member of the multitude possessed the breath of life—the divine gift of existence, but, at the same time, he realised that the multitude is unconscious of this gift. He could not reconcile its lethargic condition with his own excess of life. He prays that some new "idea" will prove sufficiently vital to agitate it, and to cause it to throw its useless burden away for ever. Jefferies, despite his grasp of the reality of the difficulty, did not despair. He used words as best he could in order to reveal the rare consciousness of life which he possessed. He strove to invest his words with their purest and divinest meaning. His repetition of certain words, especially in "The Story of My Heart," are instances of his passionate desire to be understood. The word "Sun," for example, occurs dozens of times, but it never becomes commonplace; the

spirit of his writing gives the word a new meaning. He is ever conscious of the Sun. "As I move about in the sunshine I feel in the midst of the supernatural; in the midst of immortal things." And, again, "So intensely conscious of the sun, the sky, and limitless space, I felt, too, in the midst of Eternity." When it is realised that to point out the Sun to the average civilised person is to court ridicule, then it is not difficult to understand that Richard Jefferies had very little in common with civilisation.

From his youth upwards, Jefferies lived and worked amid natural and uncivilised surroundings. He was born at Coate Farm, in the North Wiltshire hamlet of Chisledon, on November 6th, 1848. From his childhood, he possessed a strong love of Nature, which eventually became his supreme passion. His early work reveals little promise of genius, for in the essays and books which he wrote before "The Story of My Heart" we find mere observation, careful and detailed, expressed in a fresh and simple style, but containing no suggestion of the Cosmic vision or rapturous "Soul-thought" which dominated his later writings.

The development of his genius may be divided into two phases: the early phase, in which he loved to observe natural objects and to record them in picturesque prose, and the later phase, in which the mystery latent in natural objects slowly became for him a spiritual reality, more real even than the things themselves. It is important that this point should be clear. Jefferies did not cease to be conscious of natural objects in proportion as he became



more conscious of their mystery. He became conscious of the fact that those natural objects which he had first loved merely for their external beauty or appearance—the sun, the earth, trees, flowers, and the sea—these he realised were the manifestations of a Cosmic or Spiritual creative energy; and this new truth, far from depreciating the significance of natural objects, gave them an additional value.

“He saw—he felt Nature . . . the wind spoke to him in mystic language.”

In “Bevis” we find the following passage which expresses this feeling more adequately:—

“The heavens were as much a part of life as the elms, the oak, the house, the garden, and orchard, the meadows and the brook. They were no more separated from the furniture of the parlour than the old oak chair where he sat and saw the new moon shine over the mulberry tree. They were neither above nor beneath; they were in the same place with him, just as when you walk in the wood the trees are all about you, on a plane with you, and so he felt the constellations and the sun on a plane with him, and that he was moving among them as the earth rolled on, like them, with them, in the stream of space.”

In many such passages Jefferies invests commonplace objects with new values. His consciousness had commenced to penetrate reality. He perceived something more than the obvious—something which inspired and illuminated his writing. He had ceased to accept the natural world of appearance for

granted, there was something more than the mere appearance of things to account for.

Jefferies' powers did not culminate, as in most cases of imaginative writers, with the playful distortion of facts or with the merely fantastic; he became something infinitely greater than an "imaginative writer"; that he possessed great imagination is, of course, true; but he also came to possess, through imagination, a quality much rarer even than imagination—a vision which seemed to dominate imagination and use it up in its own higher interests. Imagination for Jefferies was a means, not an end.

"Never, never," he says, "rest contented with any circle of ideas, but always be certain that a wider one is still possible. For my thought is like a hyperbola that continually widens, ascending."

With Jefferies' increase of life-consciousness had also necessarily been born a knowledge of his limitations. He realised the immensity of existence that was beyond his power to attain or to conceive. Hence his insatiable desire for yet more consciousness of existence. Having been awakened to the fact of life, he could conceive no limit to the possibilities of life. In the following passage he describes his process of initiation into the Cosmic Consciousness:—

"Moving up the sweet short turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich pure air, a deeper desire. The very light of the Sun was whiter and more brilliant here. By the time I had reached the



summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. . . I was utterly alone with the sun and the earth. Lying down on the grass, I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air, and the distant sea, far beyond sight. I thought of the earth's firmness—I felt it bear me up; through the grassy couch there came an influence as if I could feel the great earth speaking to me. I thought of the wandering air—it pureness, which is its beauty; the air touched me, and gave me something of itself. I spoke to the sea; though so far, in my mind, I saw it, green at the rim of the earth and blue in deeper ocean; I desired to have its strength, its mystery, and glory. Then I addressed the Sun, desiring the soul equivalent of his light and brilliance, his endurance, and unwearied race. . . By all these I prayed; I felt an emotion of the soul beyond all definition; prayer is a puny thing to it, and the word is a rude sign to the feeling, but I know no other. . . With all the intensity of feeling which exalted me, all the intense communion I held with the earth, the Sun, and sky, the stars, hidden by the light, with the ocean—in no manner can the thrilling depth of these feelings be written—with these I prayed, as if they were the keys of an instrument, of an organ, with which I swelled forth the notes of my soul, redoubling my own voice by their power. . . . Next to myself, I came and recalled myself, my bodily existence. I held out my hand, the sunlight gleamed on the skin and the iridescent nails; I recalled the mystery and beauty of the flesh. I

thought of the mind with which I could see the ocean sixty miles distant, and gather to myself its glory. I thought of my inner existence, that consciousness which is called the soul. These, that is, myself, I threw into the balance to weigh the prayer the heavier. My strength of body, mind, and soul, I flung into it; I put forth my strength; I wrestled and laboured, and toiled in might of prayer. The prayer, this soul-emotion, was in itself—not for an object—it was a passion. I hid my face in the grass, and was wholly prostrated; I lost myself in the wrestle; I was rapt and carried away. . . . I see now that what I laboured for was soul-life, more soul-nature, to be exalted, to be full of soul-learning. . . . Let my soul become enlarged; I am not enough; I am little and contemptible. I desire a greatness of soul, an irradiance of mind, a deeper insight, a broader hope.”

Throughout “The Story of My Heart” this wrought mood is sustained. When one realises the limitations of words and also the liability of much reiterated phrases to become verbose, we realise the value of Jefferies’ “Confession,” which at no time becomes verbose, but sustains, throughout, an intensity of emotion which seems almost beyond the power of words to express.

“A nexus of ideas exists of which nothing is known—a vast system of ideas—a cosmos of thought. There is an Entity, a Soul-Entity, as yet unrecognised. These, rudely expressed, constitute my Fourth Idea. It is beyond, or beside, the three discovered by the Cavemen; it is in addition to the

existence of the Soul; in addition to immortality; and beyond the idea of deity. I think there is something more than existence. . . .

"There is so much beyond all that has ever been imagined. As I write these words, in the very moment, I feel that the whole air, the sunshine out yonder lighting up the ploughed earth, the distant sky, the circumambient ether, and that far space, is full of soul-secrets, soul-life, things outside the experience of all the ages. The fact of my own existence as I write, as I exist at this second, is so marvellous, so miracle-like, strange, and supernatural to me, that I unhesitatingly conclude I am always on the margin of life illimitable, and that there are higher conditions than existence."

Jefferies conceives that man may become a more sensitive instrument, able to record and store within himself sense impressions of a cosmic, or universal nature. Man is to magnify himself by means of his increased consciousness of those illimitable forces which have created him. He is to burst from the narrow circle of ideas which at present confines his consciousness.

To-day man's sense of existence is, to a dangerous extent, limited by all those purely material and chiefly artificial things, which are antagonistic to his cosmic evolution. The sense of private property, for example, which causes men to prize accumulated "things" out of all proportion to their value. The sense of, and power of wealth, and the non-human standards of life and conduct which such artificial power creates. All these are antag-

onistic to the development of man's highest potentialities.

"It is in myself that I desire increase, profit, and exaltation of body, mind, and soul. The surroundings, the clothes, the dwelling, the social status, the circumstances are to me utterly indifferent. Let the floor of the room be bare, let the furniture be a plank table, the bed a mere pallet. Let the house be plain and simple, but in the midst of air and light. . . . Let me be furnished in myself with health, safety, strength, the perfection of physical existence; let my mind be furnished with highest thoughts of soul-life. Let me be in myself, myself fully. The pageantry of power, the still more foolish pageantry of wealth, the senseless precedence of place; I fail words to express my utter contempt for such pleasure or such ambitions."

But these things in which Jefferies could find no value are, in our civilisation to-day, elevated into the nature of social ideals! Material luxury is what the people aim to secure. Social position, wealth, finery, costly apparel, and extravagant habitation. These extraneous "things" constitute the modern social ideal in which cause our people are so enthusiastic. In these things is embodied the whole meaning of life; the sum total of human existence. From the bottom to the top of the social ladder men and women would secure these things were they possessed of the necessary money to pay for them. They are obsessed with false values of life, and until these values are generally recognised as being false, no permanent or real social improve-

ment can take place. Modern life is organised upon a commercial and materialistic basis, which is utterly opposed, even to the consideration, of such ideas as Jefferies'. Jefferies is, in fact, the antithesis of civilisation.

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"This," he writes, referring to the London crowds, "is the vortex and whirlpool, the centre of human life to-day on the earth. Now the tide rises, and now it sinks, but the flow of these rivers always continues. Here it seethes and whirls, not for an hour only, but for all present time, hour by hour, day by day, year by year.

"Here it rushes and pushes, the atoms triturate and grind, and, eagerly thrusting by, pursue their separate ends. Here it appears in its unconcealed personality, indifferent to all else but itself, absorbed and rapt in eager self, devoid and stripped of conventional gloss and politeness, yielding only to get its own way; driving, pushing, carried on in a stress of feverish force. . . . The friction of a thousand interests evolves a condition of electricity, in which men are moved to and fro without considering their steps. Yet the agitated pool of life is stonily indifferent, the thought is absent or preoccupied, for it is evident that the mass are unconscious of the scene in which they act.

"But it is more sternly real than the very stones, for all these men and women that pass through are driven on by the push of accumulated circumstances; they cannot stay; they must go; their necks are in the slaves' ring; they are beaten like seaweed against

the solid walls of fact. . . . Where will be these millions of to-day in a hundred years? But, further than that, let us ask: where then will be the sum and outcome of their labour? If they wither away like summer grass, will not at least a result be left which those of a hundred years hence may be the better for? No, not one jot! There will not be any sum or outcome or result of this ceaseless labour and movement; it vanishes in the moment that it is done, and in a hundred years nothing will be there, for nothing is there now."

To the highly civilised mind, such writing as this will appear irrational and perverse. Of course, it is impossible for any individual cog, as it were, in this grinding machinery of civilisation to appreciate Jefferies' point of view. Obviously, they would refuse to lead such a "life" were they as conscious of the higher phases of existence as was Jefferies. It is precisely because they *are* an unconscious *product* of civilisation that they cannot realise what they are doing. These people will even boast about civilisation; will use the word in the sense of it being a boon and a blessing; a culmination of human progress; the crown of life! I have taken Jefferies as being a high type of man, intensely conscious of life, of its beauty, divinity, and of its infinite possibilities. Those of us who are agreed that Jefferies was not a madman must acknowledge that a society which could not please such a high type of man must be decadent. Is Jefferies an undesirable type? Is the modern commercial type better?

The essential truth to grasp is the sanity of the



object which Jefferies held persistently in view. He never for a single instant lost hold upon his personality, his innermost self, nor of the earth, nor of any of life's manifestations. These he had always in mind; they were necessary to his "idea"; he desired *through* them to invest them with more meaning, and to intensify man's relationship to them. Thus is the beauty of flesh, and of physical perfection included and bound up as essential parts of his "idea." No torturing of the flesh for Jefferies; no crucifixion of the body; no denial of the senses. These things are to be released from "morality" altogether. Viewed sanely and without prejudice, they are beyond the necessity of "morality." They must, by the fact of their existence in Nature, be justified. Jefferies does not regard his body as an impediment to spiritual evolution. He does not repudiate his personal identity in order to attain Nirvana. His "idea" does not involve a casting off of the flesh in order to escape from the five senses. It is in reality a sixth sense—a super-sense.

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From birth to death, men and women are floated swiftly down the polluted stream of civilisation. A consciousness that all is not well manifests itself in "Social Reforms," but these, even when effective, make no vital change in the way of life; they merely alleviate or attempt to alleviate the material stress where it has become most painful and obviously evil. Narcotics are invented; "pleasures" are artificially manufactured; but the root cause of social misery and disease is unperceived.

Extreme commercialism has fastened itself so securely upon the mind of man that he cannot escape from the false values it involves. Even the unborn child is reckoned with in terms of cash. The majority have undergone a systematic course of perversion; they think in terms of money. The average individual's life is secondary to money. Money comes first, then; what is it possible to do with money? Man adjusts his mode of life to the arbitrary commandments of his salary. Food, clothing, home, - education, and amusement, civilised man realises these fundamental things, not as the natural *rights* of every man and woman born into existence, but as relative to the possession of certain sums of money. Money is the paramount reality; approach him from a more rational and, at the same time, more spiritual premises, and you will not be taken seriously. Man in adapting himself to money has become absolutely dependent upon it. He is the slave of his purse. Life worship is beyond the power of his intelligence to grasp. He is obsessed by the idea that "Progress," either collective or individual, is only to be measured by money. Thus: the richest nation is the finest nation, and the individual who has succeeded in amassing the most wealth is, likewise, the finest individual. Apart from this crude and entirely false generalisation, the mass of men and women to-day cannot conceive either progress or fineness. A man who, like Jefferies, proclaims that the development of a human being uncorrupted by mercenary ideas is much more likely to produce a noble type than a development



exclusively dominated by mercenary ideas, is ignored. Such a man comes immediately into conflict with the deeply-rooted modern religion of pounds, shillings, and pence.

One of the most fundamental criticisms of civilised man is expressed by Jefferies in six words: "*They are unconscious of the Sun.*"

Is there any sadder sight than that of a van load of poor city folk deposited in the forest? They are completely in discord with their environment. Free from the groove of their every-day life and routine, they caper about wildly and excitedly in order to exhaust what little primitive energy they are still possessed of. But they evince no real appreciation of Nature's loveliness in her uncivilised and natural state. They have lost those special senses which Nature evolves in order that man may enjoy her gifts. Their sense of colour, for instance, is gone. They have no eye for the natural colour harmonies of foliage. Their sense of hearing is also at a loss; they cannot distinguish the multitude of musical sounds from birds and insects which are part of the forest life. Nature cannot deeply please them.

Hear them returning home late at night in the brakes—not elevated or inspired by their brief sojourn in the forest, but shouting the ribald meaningless "songs" of civilisation. No new experience has been revealed to them; no fresh joy or deeper meaning has come into what they call "life." As they set forth, so they return. They are insensible to the sight of beauty; irresponsible to anything

which has not been spoiled by the blight of civilisation.

It is certain that were a party of "holiday-makers" to come upon a cinema in the heart of the forest they would flock inside to see the "pictures" (provided they were free). The last connecting link between them and the primitive nature spirit of their ancestors is the subconscious motive which causes them to choose the forest for a day's outing. The forest is *different* to their every-day surroundings, but the distinction has no deeper significance than one of mere novelty. They are unconscious, both of the drabness of their civilised suburban environment and also of the primitive beauty of the uncivilised. If it were possible to transplant a few thousand of highly civilised people into an hitherto uninhabited forest it is certain that in a few years the disease of civilisation would be in a flourishing condition. Beauties of landscape would be transformed into the horrors of suburban streets; cinemas would be built on the edge of the streams. The screech of gramophones would mar the song of birds, advertisements would adorn every oak, providing all the trees were not cut down in order to make room for cheap "flats" and other formless architecture. Competition between rival tradesmen, etc., would intensify; means of transit between the forest colony and the outlying large towns would be devised; the population would increase, and in the course of a generation the forest will have entirely disappeared; a large commercial city will stand upon its site; civilisation will have been extended; money values will have become ex-

clusive; the individuals who inhabit the new city will feel quite comfortable and, moreover, proud of their civic achievement. A "Tube" station will mark the spot where the forest began, and a motor-'bus garage where it ended. In the course of time, with the development of industry, the representative man of this people will emerge and become the model of progress—their commercial ideal personified—the millionaire.

We are a race systematically trained in the art of money-making. Our representative man, therefore, is not a cosmic type like Jefferies, but a commercial type like Carnegie. That is the type of genius which we are producing.

In order to gain control over, and to accumulate vast sums of money, the millionaire has been obliged to concentrate his whole force of mind upon commercial, that is, upon false values. He has, in short, become a commercial monomaniac. He has excluded from his mind all consciousness of non-commercial values; otherwise, he could not have been successful as a money-maker. He has ultimately succeeded in isolating himself from all cosmic or spiritual values, and he cannot be approached through such values. He is at the opposite pole to Jefferies. For Jefferies has succeeded in doing the direct reverse of this. He has excluded from his consciousness all those commercial values and ideas which the commercial genius has continually fostered and developed, to the extinction of his higher self; the commercial genius murders his soul just as surely as Jefferies preserves and cultivates his. For the man of com-

merce there is no spiritual ecstasy; no deep and passionate consciousness of life. He cannot exclaim with Jefferies, "O, beautiful human life! Tears come in my eyes as I think of it. So beautiful, so inexpressibly beautiful." He is cut off, separated, as it were, from the source of life which has given him existence; a prodigal of the soul. The question arises: of what possible use can Jefferies' new circle of ideas prove to the majority of civilised people, seeing that so few are sufficiently conscious of life to appreciate their value? In an agony of doubt, Jefferies asked himself the same question.

"Is there any theory, philosophy, or creed; is there any system or culture, any formulated method able to meet and satisfy each separate item of this agitated pool of human life. By which they may be guided, by which hope, by which look forward? Not a mere illusion of the craven heart, something real, as real as the solid walls of fact against which, like drifted seaweed, they are dashed; something to give each separate personality sunshine and a flower in its own existence now; something to shape this million-handed labour to an end and outcome that will leave more sunshine and more flowers to those who must succeed? Something real now, and not in the spirit-land; in this hour now, as I stand and the Sun burns. Can any creed, philosophy, system, or culture endure the test and remain unmolten in this fierce focus of human life?"

Jefferies does not altogether despair that such a redeeming idea or circle of ideas exist or will come into existence.

" Full well aware that all has failed, yet side by side with the sadness of that knowledge, there lives on in me an unquenchable belief, thought burning like the Sun, that there is yet something to be found, something real, something to give each separate personality sunshine and flowers in its own existence now. . . . It must be dragged forth by might of thought from the immense forces of the universe."

In such moods as this Jefferies seems to have realised acutely something of the deep tragedy contained in human life. A tragedy which he could not successfully reconcile with the idea of a " directing intelligence," " God," or " Deity."

" There is nothing human in Nature. The earth, though loved so dearly, would let me perish on the ground and neither bring forth food nor water. Burning in the sky the great Sun, of whose company I have been so fond, would merely burn on and make no motion to assist me. Those who have been in an open boat at sea without water have proved the mercies of the Sun, and of the deity who did not give them one drop of rain, dying in misery under the same rays that smile so beautifully on the flowers. . . . There is nothing human in the whole round of Nature. All Nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass. If the entire human race perished at this hour, what difference would it make to the earth?"

Jefferies conceives that we are the product of natural laws, and being thus a product or part of such laws, can expect nothing sentimental from

them. Nothing, that is, which would cause a law to act otherwise than a law. "All things," he says, "being without design, shape, or purpose, I conclude that no Deity has anything to do with Nature. There is no God in Nature, nor in any matter anywhere, either in the clouds, on the earth, or in the composition of the stars. For what we understand by the Deity is the purest form of Idea, of Mind: and no mind is exhibited in these. . . . I cease, therefore, to look for Deity in Nature, on the cosmos at large, or to trace any marks of Divine handiwork." It is perfectly clear that Richard Jefferies had no use whatever for the Christian God, or, indeed, any other God. The very idea of a "God" repelled his intelligence: insulted his sense of life. Jefferies was a complete and positive atheist: his sense of the cosmic reality of human existence made the idea of a personal God ridiculous. Of what possible use could a God be? Where in Nature is there to be found any evidence of the "loving Father" of the Christians? "How can I adequately express my contempt for the assertion that all things occur for the best, for a wise and beneficent end, and are ordered by a humane intelligence. It is the most utter falsehood, and a crime against the human race. . . . Human suffering is so great, so endless, so awful, that I can hardly write of it. . . . The whole, and the worst, the worst pessimist can say is far beyond the least particle of the truth. It is the duty of all rational beings to acknowledge the truth. There is not the least trace of directing intelligence in human affairs." It is then that Jefferies



slings the whole paraphernalia of orthodox religion, gods, altars, sacrifices, crosses, halos, etc., etc., into the abyss of nothingness. For him they have no possible conceivable meaning or relation to truth. Jefferies wanted no "God"—he had advanced mentally beyond the crude concepts of the caveman. In this, he did not differ in opinion from the Rationalist philosophers: Jefferies was a true free-thinker, but he was also a creative freethinker. He did not merely deny the existence of a "God" or "Deity" or "directing intelligence," he believed that there is something infinitely higher and greater than these ideas: he affirmed the reality of a consciousness that surpasses them. He was conscious of a deeper truth, in the light of which all lesser and crude ideas become dissolved.

The pessimism of Jefferies arose from his inability to comprehend why such a cosmic force as he was most certainly conscious of, did not effect a miracle which would release humanity in the twinkling of an eye from its present narrowness of vision. The great cosmic force was, quite obviously, non-intelligent, at least, in relation to human interests and humane ideas. The cosmic miracle that will bring intelligence into the world does not (like other miracles) happen. We wait in vain: no miracle will ever do for man what man must, quite clearly, do for himself.

Jefferies, believing that no such redeeming miracle will come about independent of man's own initiative maintains that unless the human mind becomes of itself conscious of its own limitations, and,

in consequence, revolts against its present imperfect condition, then it must fail to attain cosmic intelligence, and will continue in darkness. There is no alternative.

"The mind must acknowledge its ignorance; all the learning and lore of so many eras must be erased from it as an encumbrance. . . . Begin wholly afresh. Go straight to the Sun, the immense forces of the universe, to the entity unknown; go higher than a god; deeper than prayer; and open a new day." Man must become a child.

The fundamental distinction between a grown man and a child is one of experience, or culture: The adult mind is a product of culture, whereas the child mind is as yet in a unique condition, possessing visions of its own, apart altogether from second-hand ideas.

Our civilisation is antagonistic to the purity of the child mind. The period of infancy is made as fleeting and ephemeral as possible. Civilisation requires a mechanical mind possessing no vision. By the age of thirteen, in many cases much earlier, the conventional conception of the object of civilised existence is well beaten into the shaping mind of youth. The process, in almost every case, certainly with normal, healthy children, has been a process of painful disillusion. Few minds at the early age of thirteen or fourteen can express the mental and spiritual experiences which they are called upon by the inexorable rules of society to undergo; nor can they protest with any effect against these rules. But each one of us can testify to the pain involved.



No office boy is truly happy; he is prematurely resigned. The cosmic joy of life which stimulated his consciousness before the civilising process had commenced its operations upon his personality, this cosmic joy of life has been most skilfully destroyed. He is chafed mentally between two fundamentally opposing realities—Youth and Commercialism. The office is merely an extension of the school with the playground eliminated. For him, the world has suddenly narrowed down, and will continue to do so until the process of civilisation has finished with him, and he is unconscious of what is happening. For, when the office boy has passed through the conventional commercial metamorphosis, you will observe the same docile and resigned expression upon his face—only it is a little less strained. He has been successfully inoculated with that conception of life which was at one time abhorrent to him: a conception that revolted his youth and shocked his cosmic vitality. Civilisation, with its deathly ideal of mechanical efficiency, has claimed his sacred part, and the child, like his father before him, will live more or less like a machine—bereft of the joy of life: starved of the Sun.

“The truth is,” says Jefferies, “we die through our ancestors; we are murdered by our ancestors. Their dead hands stretch forth from the tomb and drag us down to their mouldering bones. We in our turn are now at this moment preparing death for our unborn posterity. This day those that die do not die in the sense of old age, they are slain. Nothing has been accumulated for our benefit in ages past.

All the labour and the toil of so many millions continued through such vistas of time, down to those millions who at this hour are rushing to and fro in London, has accumulated nothing for us. Nothing for our good. The only things that have been stored up have been for our evil and destruction, diseases and weaknesses crossed and cultivated and rendered almost part and parcel of our very bones."

A man or woman must be very liberally endowed with personality to preserve any power of soul or cosmic vitality after the civilising process has had a few years start. The great struggling majority, toiling in the meshes of civilisation, never attain anything except nervous exhaustion, brain fag, premature decay and poverty, both of mind and pocket.

Commercialism demands the youth of a nation, treats it entirely as a commodity, just like so much coal, wood, or iron. The beauty which is born in us is speedily shocked into ugliness and becomes a negligible quality. The artist in the child is systematically slaughtered in the interest of commercial profits. We are sacrificed to a muddled and evil will which we find too widely diffused to assail with any heartening effect. Can it be possible that the tragedy of human life will ever be adequately realised?

Jefferies perceived that civilisation has produced a new type of individual, who is unconscious of its defects. What he feels so keenly is that for the majority life has become entirely commonplace. The Sun, sky, sea, stars, trees, and flowers which intoxicated and inspired Jefferies arouse in them no

cosmic response whatever. The savage, who is conscious of the grandeur and power of the Sun—so much so that it moves him to worship, is existing upon an infinitely higher plane of life than civilised man, who regards the Sun with complete indifference. Life to this unfortunate person has become obvious—commonplace. If the Sun were to suddenly change its shape or turn blue, civilised man would not trouble—providing, of course, that such a miracle did not reduce his salary or cause him any serious social inconvenience.

Civilisation has created artificial lines of thought and has evolved a special kind of mind to think along them. The "Religion" of such a people has no deep or spiritual root in their actual lives, but is a purely subordinate affair. The religion of Jefferies is for every moment of life: it *is* life—existence in essence. "In this hour now, as I stand and Sun burns."

"Religion" as we know it generally in its popular sense—consisting of churches, sects, creeds, etc.—is surpassed by Jefferies' idea altogether. It becomes a mere excrescence, not an essence—or purity—at all. It deals with life in bits and pieces, not as a unity or entity, as the cosmic mind conceives it. The fact that man is still fighting his neighbour for the bare physical necessities of his existence proves that as yet we have had no really vital religion, using the word in its highest sense. Jefferies is astounded "that twelve thousand written years should have elapsed, and the human race—able to reason and to think, and easily capable of combina-

tion in immense armies for its own destruction—should still live from hand to mouth, like cattle and sheep. . . . In twelve thousand written years the world has not yet built itself a House nor filled a Granary, nor organised itself for its own comfort. . . This our earth produces not only a sufficiency, but a superabundance, and pours a cornucopia of good things down upon us. Further, it produces sufficient for stores and granaries to be filled to the roof-tree for years ahead. I verily believe that the earth in one year produces enough food to last for thirty. Why, then, have we not enough? Why do people die of starvation, or lead a miserable existence on the verge of it? Why have millions upon millions to toil from morning to evening just to gain a mere crust of bread? Because of the absolute lack of organisation. . . .”

Jefferies felt that man should organise life upon such a sane basis as would allow for the creation of a society in which the physical and the spiritual might become an harmonious and conscious whole.

The root cause of humanity's failure to achieve this lies, as Jefferies persistently points out, in the fact that we have separated the soul from the body, and the body from the soul. Our “Religion” is based upon the separation of body and soul. Hence, we have religious sects which concentrate upon the one to the neglect of the other, and in so doing worship an abstraction which has no real existence, a mere negation of the body—a nothingness. Jefferies insisted upon the flesh, upon the beauty and divinity of the human form; the sweetness of the body. He

would remove from the flesh that stigma of "sin" and uncleanness which has hypnotised man into a consciousness of "Evil."

Jefferies believed "all manner of asceticism to be the vilest blasphemy—blasphemy towards the whole of the human race. . . . The ascetics are the only persons who are impure. Increase of physical beauty is attended by increase of soul beauty. The soul is higher even by gazing on beauty. Let me be fleshly perfect."

We must know life as a whole in order to live in harmony with the cosmic streams of energy. Jefferies advocates physical exercise as a "sacred duty." But this is only a part of the whole of life. The baboon is physically perfect. No man can hope to surpass the ape in muscular vitality and strength.

Nevertheless, the physical ideal must accompany the spiritual; these two factors must coalesce. The importance of a healthy body as a *means* to the soul perfection is what Jefferies recognises as a fundamental necessity.

The Greeks realised the importance of combining physical perfection with the perfection of mind; and this race approached nearest to Jefferies' ideal than any other in the history of the world. Their art has never been surpassed. We can no longer pretend that the "Soul" is independent or detachable from the body. The brain, as an instrument for recording cosmic impressions of varying intensity is easily deranged by slight causes—a faulty digestive system (produced by civilisation) will change the whole attitude of a man's consciousness

towards existence. A slight pressure upon Jefferies' brain would have altered his conception of life; would have fogged the sensitive plate of his mind.

Science is a highly specialised knowledge, and cannot interpret life as a whole, but Jefferies' idea travels with it in so far as it is the affirmation of the physical or material manifestation of the Life-Spirit. The prevalent and disastrous error that modern people make is in assuming that scientific knowledge can explain away the secret and mystery of Life. It cannot; all that science can do is to analyse and investigate the "material" effects of a cause which lies behind such phenomena.

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What we must first endeavour to understand is that in Nature—in existence—there is no divorce of separately conceived parts or factors. There is a Life unity, not necessarily "material," nor necessarily "spiritual," but a something more than either. Conceive Life as an infinite continuity, an Eternal process of which we ourselves are the vital element. No amount of abstract reasoning or unconsciousness can destroy our relation to this Life-process; but by becoming conscious of our relation to it and of our existence *in* it, we are exalted and magnified; we experience a conscious harmony within our deepest self merging with the cosmic energies of the universe. I want to suggest an evolution of consciousness of existence. Jefferies does so in his soul-prayer: "That I might have the deepest soul-life, the deepest of all; deeper far than all this greatness of the visible universe and even of the invisible;



that I might have a fulness of soul till now unknown, and utterly beyond my own conception."

This is a language which civilisation cannot understand. It does not contain the word "money." How is it, then, that after so many thousands of years humanity is unable to appreciate such ideas? Jefferies himself blames ignorance. "The human race," he says, "for ages upon ages, has been enslaved by ignorance and by interested persons whose object it has been to confuse the minds of men. . . . The world is not mad—only in ignorance, an interested ignorance, kept up by strenuous exertions, from which infernal darkness it will, in the course of time, emerge. . . ."

That Jefferies should be so charged with hope for mankind is not the least remarkable of his qualities. The inspired mind as it contemplates the natural discrepancy between it and the comparatively limited consciousness of the multitude, which it would intensify and elevate to its own high state, is apt to become pessimistic. But Jefferies does not despair; he possesses too much faith in the infinite possibilities of Life. He believes that the Spirit of life will ultimately prove sufficiently strong in purpose to overwhelm its manifestations, and charge them with a consciousness of itself.

In his novel, "The Dewy Morn," Jefferies created his ideal type of woman, "Felise." She is the incarnation of his passion for joyous, earthly beauty. The following passage is particularly beautiful:—

"Felise was lying on the flowers and grass, ex-

tended under the sun, steeped in their sweetness. She visibly sat on the oak-trunk; invisibly her nature was reclining as the swimmer on the sun-warmed sea. Her frame drooped as the soul, which bears it up, flowed outwards, feeling to grass, and flower, and leaf, as the swimmer spreads the arms abroad and the fingers feel the water. She sighed with deep content, dissolving in the luxurious bath of beauty.

“ Her strong heart beating, the pulses throbbing, her bosom rising and regularly sinking with the rich waves of life; her supple limbs and roundness filled with the plenty of ripe youth; her white, soft, roseate skin, the surface where the sun touched her hand glistening with the dew of the pore; the bloom upon her, that glow of the morn of life—the hair more lovely than the sunlight; the grace unwritten of perfect form—these produced within her a sense of existence—a consciousness of being, to which she was abandoned; and her lips parted to sigh. The sigh was the expression of feeling herself to be. To be! To live! To have an intense enjoyment in every inspiration of breath; in every beat of the pulse; in every movement of the limbs; in every sense!”

“ Felise ” is possessed of a divine femininity which the women of to-day are lacking. Forced by capitalism and its attendant false standards of life, into labour competition with men, women are losing even the physical beauty which they have possessed in the past. For as the divorce between body and soul be-

comes more firmly established, so must the two separated parts of the whole slowly decay. The purest conception of human existence has no place in our commercial civilisation. Men have been vitiated and demoralised by commercial values and ideals. Women are blindly following in their footsteps.

Commercialism denies, not only the necessity of Cosmic life values, but also the necessity of physical perfection. At one stroke it destroys both. The highest possibilities of human life are thus thwarted at every point. Even the innocent child is not permitted to remain uncontaminated. Its early youth is spoiled and perverted by serious preparation for entrance into competition for the material means of life with others such as itself. False values are inoculated from infancy. Its lowest qualities are scientifically developed by means of a mercenary social ideal; and when maturity is reached the man is a lop-sided product—soul castrated.

The human brain has arrived at once great confidence: the confidence in money, and in money values: no other confidence rivals it. There is much more real and revoltingly sincere confidence in the power of the dollar than in "God" or man, or the possibilities of human life. There is more true faith in pounds, shillings, and pence, than in humanity.

This confidence in the commercial reality of money values is the solid basis, as it were, of the continued existence of the vast majority of "civilised" men and women. Destroy the confidence enjoyed by the people in cash values and civilisation would become an even greater manifestation of chaos than

it already is. There would be no faith in anything at all. No faith in man, "God," reason, science or art. The most effective power that man is possessed of would appear to be a genius for commercialising everything that emanates from his brain! If a thing or idea can be successfully commercialised, then the people will believe in it. Money is the standard of truth. Religion will perish when it ceases to be adequately subsidised.

Destroying this great and almost supernatural confidence of humanity in money, would destroy the only balance in the human mind which works effectively. The mechanism of pounds, shillings, and pence runs smoothly in the modern brain, and is oiled quite effectively by the "get-rich-quick" ideal.

The life of the average individual is quite mechanical.

Machinery to-day is so integral a part of civilised life that man himself is competing with it for existence. The purely mechanical significance of wheels and cogs and ingenious mechanisms are daily and hourly being forced into the consciousness of man. The machine sets the pace of life; man must perforce adjust his powers to it and develop those qualities which are best able to imitate the machine. He will adapt his powers to such an end quite successfully (from a commercial standpoint), but in the specialising process he will become unconscious of the sacrifice which has been demanded of him.

Side by side with machinery, as a modern tyrant, stands the idea of "Time." Man is haunted by the idea of "Time." His fingers are constantly upon

his watchchain; hour by hour his eyes stray mechanically to the face of the clock. Money, Machinery, and Time. These are the Holy Trinity of modern life. They cannot be separated. They tyrannise man as no mere religion has tyrannised his. They have become a necessary part of his existence; apart from them he is unable to think or live.

"No benefit to the heart or to the body accrues from the most accurate mechanism."

Jefferies also repudiates the idea of "Time." "I cannot," he says, "understand Time. It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine; I am in it, as the butterfly floats in the light-laden air. Nothing has to come; it is now; now is Eternity; now is the immortal life. . . . The years, the centuries, the cycles are absolutely nothing. . . . To the soul there is no past and no future; all is and will be ever, in now. For artificial purposes time is mutually agreed on, but there is really no such thing. The shadow goes on upon the dial, the index moves around upon the clock, and what is the difference? None whatever. If the clock had never been set going, what would have been the difference? . . . My soul has never been and never can be dipped in Time. Time has never existed and never will; it is a purely artificial arrangement. . . . There is no separation—no past; eternity, the Now, is continuous. When all the stars have revolved they only produce Now again. The continuity of Now is for ever."

To the time-tyrannised mind of civilised man this idea of a continuous "*Now*" may appear to be a

mere fantasy. Most people will maintain that there is nothing easier to comprehend than "Time." Naturally enough, for as I have said, it tyrannises their lives from birth to death; it is the artificial arbiter that sets limits to all their actions; but "Time" is a measure of eternity, and eternity cannot be measured! Man has become *conscious* of the hours; their automatic procession marches relentlessly behind all that he does; he is never able to lose himself, either in work or in recreation, apart from a consciousness that they are thus marching, and that at a certain moment he must reverse his conduct.

Thus has arisen a mechanical routine which converts men into the most punctual of slaves. Their lives become a limited part of the artificial idea of "Time" and lose the spontaneous abandon to impulse which primitive man enjoyed. The modern mind cannot, as did Jefferies', become conscious of eternity as a continuity of "*Now*," that is of existence in essence apart from the artificial limitations imposed by "Time."

It would seem that Jefferies' consciousness of the vital or cosmic part of his being eliminated the necessity of bothering about such a superficial and local idea as "Time."

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It is admitted by all students of medicine and of human disease that animals live a much saner and healthier life than civilised man. Animals live by instinct, and their instinct is infallible. They eat when hungry, rest when tired, sleep when sleepy,



rise when they *feel* like rising, and mate when they so desire; they are unconscious of the idea of "Time"; they live naturally, and are content. I am aware that to compare animals with men and women is to be accused of crudeness. But this fact is obstinate: that man, when he allows himself to become highly civilised, brings upon himself countless new diseases and subtle torments of the nervous system which no animal has ever suffered. By his mechanical routine and consciously systematic existence, measured in every detail by the hands of the clock, he develops life shortening and joy destroying conditions of life which are in danger of producing a community of mentally deficient individuals. Three out of every four engaged in clerical work perish prematurely. Professional men, worked to the last possible minute in order to compete successfully with their rivals become victims to neurasthenia and other more complex diseases of the maltreated brain and nervous system.

It is the false, the local, and surface values of human existence that are breeding these terrible conditions of modern "life," and for what purpose?

Why, we ask, and for what possible present or future benefit to the human race must three out of every four clerks die premature deaths from regular confinement day after day in a vitiated atmosphere? Instinct, which preserves the health and strength of the beasts has apparently become dormant in man; otherwise, he would refuse to live under such disease-productive conditions. Instinct is a cosmic gift; it proceeds from the universal; it descends

direct and first hand from the creative energies. Disease is the punishment of disobedience to these cosmic energies. Civilised man has become separated from a personal consciousness of this truth. He does not realise his existence as a part of the whole force of the universe. He has set up a table of purely local values; these values are contained in and obeyed within the area of civilisation, and from them proceed the miseries and subtle inhumanities which constitute the Social Problem. To-day there is every indication that man will suffer increasingly for confusing local values with cosmic or universal values. Jefferies has illustrated the distinction between these opposing values, the local and the cosmic, very clearly. "One summer evening," he says, "sitting by my window, I watched for the first star to appear, knowing the position of the brightest in the southern sky. The dusk came on, grew deeper, but the star did not shine. . . . Finally, I considered that I must have mistaken its position, when suddenly a puff of air blew through the branch of a pear tree, which overhung the window, a leaf moved, and there was the star behind the leaf."

The star may be likened to that part of man, the vital part, with which Jefferies prayed for a fuller existence. The leaf is a local obscuration which may be likened to man's excessive concentration upon external and material values of life. The soul of man is hidden by money, social position, the desire for artificial power, mechanical routine, shallow pleasure, and false ideas generally. This soul of man cannot become conscious of itself until such local

obscurations are removed. We stand in need of a re-valuation of these material things which have become the most essential part of man's life; a re-valuation by which man will be satisfied that it is in his highest interests to re-adjust his relation to them; and to concentrate his consciousness upon the new and higher values—the cosmic values. If such a re-valuation could come to pass, man would purge his civilisation of those fundamentally false and life-denying values which had hitherto blinded his spirit to the possibilities of its growth to a more happy and more perfect state. He would gain an infinite joy in his existence. He would be robust and beautiful in physique; healthy and pure in mind, sensitive and responsive to those cosmic harmonies of which at present he is oblivious.

Jefferies prayed that such a salvation might come. The ideas which he expressed have never lacked representatives. He stands with that small band of initiates who, from the beginning, have laboured to bring mankind the precious gift of Life; not "life" beyond the grave, that springs like a dismal salvation from the pitiful failure and tragedy of normal human existence; not a mere chimera that exists in the brain of religious decadents and sycophantic servants of an abstract deity; not these, but a *mental extension of the human personality; a natural and perfectly healthy development of normal existence.* Jefferies looks, not into the "heavens" for a rational solution of man's failure to achieve a sane and beautiful existence; he looks into the human mind, into the human ego, and it is

here that he discerns a faint glimmering of hope. He cherishes no idle illusions about any exterior or extraneous spiritual force that will assist mankind through the medium of superstitious dogma. He perceives very clearly that such things belong to the ignorant infancy of man: they are the crude illusions of our ancestors: products of undeveloped and primitive brains.

Again and again, Jefferies exhorts men and women to face the inexorable facts and realities of human existence. This, he very clearly perceives, must be the first step towards sanity. We cannot possibly order our lives sanely until we thoroughly realise exactly how we stand in relation to the laws of life. We cannot deal sensibly with life until we concentrate the whole force of our intelligence upon the material and mental conditions that environ us.

"The tomb," says Jefferies, "cries aloud to us—its dead silence presses on the drum of the ear like thunder, saying, Look at this, and erase your illusions: now know the extreme value of human life; reflect on this and strew human life with flowers; save every hour for the sunshine; let your labour be so ordered that in future times the loved ones may dwell longer with those who love them; open your minds; exalt your souls; widen the sympathies of your hearts; face the things that are now as you will face the reality of death; make joy real now to those you love, and help forward the joy of those yet to be born. Let these facts force the mind and the soul to the increase of thought, and the consequent remission of misery; so that those whose time it is

to die may have enjoyed all that is possible in life . . . let us, turning away from the illusion of a directing intelligence, look earnestly for something better than a god, seek for something higher than prayer, and lift our souls to be with the more than immortal now."

Philosophy of this kind, a philosophy that is fearless in the face of truth—even when truth destroys every comforting illusion, such philosophy appals the average mind, and the reason is not difficult to understand—nor is it hard to sympathise with. The great mass of men and women have been literally inoculated with superstitious conceptions of human life; their minds, from youth upwards, have been pressed into the conventional mental moulds that were first shaped and fashioned by savages. We are seduced from truth before we understand the virtue of commonsense and logic. We cannot wonder that the great mass of people find the sentiments of a man like Richard Jefferies repulsive. We have been deceived from the very cradle: deceived by well-meaning yet ignorant individuals who knew no better than to serve out the same dogmatic dope with which they themselves were made insensible to the facts of life.

But where do we stand to-day? Of what utility has been the dope? Where may be found the adequate excuse for its employment? Civilisation is at the breaking point; human society has failed to deal with life in an intelligent fashion: we are beginning to realise that man's destiny lies entirely in his own hands. Do we want healthier

and less degenerate conditions of life?—then we ourselves, by the application of our own brain power and intelligence, must create those conditions. Superstitious dope cannot save us; it hampers progress: flings an evil shadow upon the upward track of man; betrays his evolutionary purpose and gives a terrible reactionary power into the hands of those who hate freedom and light.

“The mind,” says Jefferies, “is infinite and able to understand everything that is brought before it; there is no limit to its understanding. The limit is the littleness of the things and the narrowness of the ideas which have been put for it to consider. . . . The mind requires more, and more, and more. It is so strong that all that can be put before it is devoured in a moment. Left to itself it will not be satisfied with an invisible idol any more than with a wooden one. An idol whose attributes are omnipresence, omnipotence, and so on, is no greater than light or electricity, which are present everywhere and all-powerful, and from whom perhaps the thought arose. Prayer which receives no reply must be pronounced in vain. The mind goes on and requires more than these, something higher than prayer, something higher than a god.”

It should be perfectly clear to every human being alive to-day that the conventional deity who has been worshipped by many millions of people for countless ages of time is a mere intellectual abstraction—a subjective reality—an emanation of the primitive mind. Is it not clear that man is alone in his world? Does not every human enterprise



prove that it is man himself who helps man—or hurts man; there is no exterior force at work—no independent force. Jefferies asks for something “higher than prayer, something higher than a god.” What is this something that is higher? It is the mind of man: the intelligence and reason of man. If man were mentally strong and really intelligent he would not need the illusions afforded by superstition. If man, for example, were sufficiently sane in his ideas to organise life upon a less brutal and subversive basis than at present, he would not appreciate the necessity of a “directing intelligence,” *he himself would be the “directing intelligence”*; man would become the master of things: man would direct his life sensibly: man would become “god,” “god” would become man.

This “invisible idol,” or “god,” that has been worshipped in so many different and conflicting ways, is nothing more or less than the excuse we have made for our own incompetence. “God” represents in the abstract all those human forces and powers that are latent in man, and the more we develop and exercise these latent forces on earth, then the less we worry about their supposed existence in a “god” who exists outside the universe. In order to be really vital, “god” has to become man; and when this happens man ceases to have any use for “god.” The process is entirely one of self-development. Man does things for himself or they remain undone. Man grapples with the problems that affect his own life, and if he does not conquer them they conquer him; there is no third alternative.

Man, realising that the necessary power of creative reform resides within his own mind, will become conscious of new and more potent strength.

"Nothing," says Jefferies, "is done for us. We are born naked, and not even protected by a shaggy covering. Nothing is done for us. The first and strongest commandment (using the word to convey the idea only) that Nature, the Universe, our own bodies give, is to do everything for ourselves. The sea does not make boats for us, nor the earth of her own will build us hospitals. The injured lie bleeding, and no invisible power lifts them up. . . . These things speak with a voice of thunder. From every human being whose body has been racked by pain; from every human being who has suffered from accident or disease; from every human being drowned, burned, or slain by negligence, there goes up a continually increasing cry louder than the thunder. An awe-inspiring cry, dread to listen to, which no one dares to listen to, against which ears are stopped by the wax of superstition and the wax of criminal selfishness:—These miseries are your doing, because you have mind and thought, and could have prevented them. You can prevent them in future. You do not even try."

These words were written half-a-century ago: much has happened since then to intensify their truth and validity. The mind is repelled and bewildered by the almost indescribable chaos into which our civilisation has drifted; and, in any case, it is certain that nothing can produce better social conditions apart from the intelligence of man himself.

When we cease to rely upon exterior forces and "invisible idols" for assistance, then shall we begin to make real and lasting progress in the direction of a civilisation that worships life and builds "heavens" upon the earth. Man will realise the highest part of his nature; he will stand sanely upon his feet; he will demand, not only for himself, but also for posterity, such social conditions as best allow for his fullest possible development.

Richard Jefferies was conscious of the spirit that will make this great change possible; he was as certain of its possibility and ultimate establishment as he was of beauty and life itself. He knew that the sky, the flowers, the sea, and the summer sun shining upon his hand, were the simple yet eternal portents of the triumph of life. He knew that in these pure and beautiful manifestations of the cosmic universe lay the only true hope of man. He learned more from a ray of sunshine than from traditional superstition; he derived more real joy from vivid colour than from the dismal dogma of minds long since surpassed in the art of living; he had no use for static ideas, life was a mystical continuity that defied the fixed idea—life was dynamic.

"Twelve thousand years since the Caveman stood at the mouth of his cavern and gazed out at the night and the stars. He looked again and saw the sun rise beyond the sea. He reposed in the noon-tide heat under the shade of the trees, he closed his eyes and looked into himself. He was face to face with the earth, the sun, the night; face to face with himself. There was nothing between; no wall of

written tradition; no built-up system of culture—his naked mind was confronted by naked earth. He made three idea-discoveries, wresting them from the unknown; the existence of his soul, immortality, the deity. Now, to-day, as I write, I stand in exactly the same position as the Caveman. Written tradition, systems of culture, modes of thought, have for me no existence. . . . From earth and sea and sun, from night, the stars, from day, the trees, the hills, from my own soul—from these I think."

So it is to-day that man stands upon the eternal threshold of new life. He is hampered and hindered by the over-emphasis of the past; he is fettered mentally by ideas and conceptions that have ceased to have any real value: he is thwarted by the dead; puzzled and bewildered by the strain of adjusting his mode of life to decrepit and reactionary standards of existence.

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